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By Bob Burchette—The Washington Post

Frank Shakespeare: forays into foreign affairs.

Tarnished USIA

Hard Line and Hard Times Beset 'Propaganda' Agency

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During the Kennedy era, when Edward R. Murrow directed it, the United States Information Agency was one of Washington's glamorous bureaus. But the USIA has since slipped into hard times—and there is now even doubt whether it can long survive in its present form.

One senior staff member contends that the agency is "going to hell," and another says that he has "never seen morale so low." A young officer describes USIA programs as "just plain silly," and even people in the upper echelons of the agency concede that their organization is a "stepchild" in the Nixon administration's foreign affairs establishment.

Comprising 10,000 U.S. and foreign employees in more than 100 countries, the USIA makes movies and television films, arranges exhibitions and lectures, publishes books as, magazines and pamphlets, and feeds copy to local newspapers. Through the Voice of America, it broadcasts in languages ranging from Albanian to Urdu.

The essential purpose of this vast operation, fueled by an annual budget of \$193 million, is to promote the United States abroad.

Yet all its activities apparently have failed to give the USIA real influence in the formulation and conduct of American policy. In the view of its officials, several factors are responsible for the agency's lack of clout.

The USIA has been hit by rising costs and a steady drop in the size of its staff. About 2,000 American and foreign employees have been dismissed or retired over the past five years. Numerous overseas posts have been closed.

At the same time, although its representatives often perform key roles in U.S. diplomatic missions abroad, the agency has not gained a significant place in the Washington decision-making machinery. In that respect, its decline parallels the decline of the State Department and the more general fall in U.S. interest in foreign affairs.

See AGENCY, A2, Col. 1

AGENCY, From A1

There is frequently a sharp contrast between USIA operations abroad and in Washington. Officials overseas are usually free to function as they wish. But in Washington, controls are tighter as the USIA seeks to make its influence felt.

While USIA Director Frank Shakespeare claims to maintain close relations with President Nixon, the agency has been excluded from a seat on the White House's National Security Council, the highest body in the shaping of U.S. foreign policy.

This was not the case in previous administrations. The President's chief foreign affairs adviser, Henry Kissinger, is reportedly hostile to Shakespeare's conservative political attitudes.

Shakespeare's right-wing bias and his attempted forays into the substance of foreign affairs also have irritated Secretary of State William P. Rogers, whose department, in theory, sets down guidelines for the USIA to follow.

In the fall of 1970, when the State Department was striving to preserve the Arab-Israeli cease-fire despite Israel's disclosure of a Soviet missile buildup along the Suez Canal, Shakespeare instructed the Voice of America to assail Soviet "deception" in its radio commentaries.

That move prompted Rogers to send a memo to the President complaining about Shakespeare's intrusion into a diplomatic realm. Rogers complained, among other things, that Shakespeare's intervention violated U.S. policy, which was to avoid escalating the volatile Middle East situation.

More recently, Shakespeare's actions have again appeared to run counter to White House strategies—an indication that he may not be fully clued in to the President's thinking.

China Visit

Last summer, Shakespeare scheduled a meeting of top USIA officials in the Far East to discuss ways of "containing" Communist China. The meeting, due to

have been held in Tokyo in September, was hastily canceled when the President announced his plan to visit Peking.

Shakespeare had also authorized the head of the USIA film service, Bruce Herschensohn, to make a movie portraying the Chinese Communist takeover of Tibet and the escape to India of the Dalai Lama, the region's spiritual leader.

The movie, completed at a cost of \$73,000 after eight months of work, was quietly shelved when President Nixon's China trip was announced. But Herschensohn, a Goldwater Republican who claims that he and Shakespeare see eye-to-eye "politically and creatively," apparently hopes that the President's China policy may change. "The film is temporarily being held up," he said, "but it will be released in time."

The USIA film service, which operates on an annual budget of \$8.5 million, also bombed not long ago with a movie entitled "Vietnam!

Vietnam!" A three-year effort that cost \$250,000, the film tries to justify the U.S. commitment to Vietnam while subtly implying that President Kennedy and Johnson and the Democratic Party were responsible for the involvement in the war.

Herschensohn admits that the film's reception overseas has been "practically zero." He argues, however, that the movie "will be of great use" to historians as an "explanation and clarification" of U.S. policy in Vietnam. "The war could have been won in five minutes" if the United States had bombed Haiphong harbor and targets closer to Hanoi, he said. "But we never get complimented for our restraint."

Another USIA movie effort that has not been a big hit abroad was a film on the Fourth of July featuring Billy Graham. After viewing it, the USIA representative in the African state of Sierra Leone fired back an official message to Washington describing the film as a

"grotesquerie" and proposing that the agency's next patriotic movie portray "a close-up of a fat man's belly, with the American flag sticking out of his navel."

Some of Herschensohn's past endeavors have been of far higher caliber. His movie on the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia won an Academy Award. His film on the assassination of President Kennedy, "Years of Lightning, Day of Drums," was a masterpiece that won special congressional approval for release in the United States over GOP protests that it was flattering to the Democrats. By law, the USIA is permitted to distribute its productions overseas only.

Propaganda Business

Nevertheless, many agency officials see most of Herschensohn's output as evidence that the USIA is in the propaganda rather than information business. The view is confirmed by Shakespeare's own affirmation that the USIA is "a propaganda agency." His selection of political appointees to manage the agency has reinforced the feeling within the USIA that Shakespeare is determined to put out a special brand of conservative propaganda.

Among the top political appointees in the agency is Kenneth Giddens, millionaire Alabama theater and radio station owner who heads the Voice of America and asserts that he is engaged in a "crusade" to "awaken the world to the blessings of the free enterprise system." Another is Kenneth Towery who runs the USIA's policy section and is sometimes mentioned as a possible successor to Shakespeare.

A Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter who later served as legislative assistant to Sen. John Tower (R-Tex.), Towery strongly believes that the USIA must free itself of State Department control. He also views the role of the agency as challenging the Soviets, who he says are "coming on strong and getting stronger every day," especially in the world's developing areas.

The latest of Shake-

Shakespeare's conservative political appointees is Kent Crane, who became head of USIA activities for East Asia and the Pacific on Dec. 1. The first political appointee to head a geographic area—a post normally reserved for career officers—Crane is a former Central Intelligence Agency operative who most recently served as foreign affairs adviser to Vice President Agnew.

But the tone of the USIA is set by Shakespeare, a former Columbia Broadcasting System executive who put the Nixon image across on television as a campaign aide in the 1968 election campaign and was rewarded with the directorship of the agency.

A short, energetic man in his mid-40s, Shakespeare leaves the daily management of the agency to his deputy, Henry Loomis, a suave and efficient administrator who once manged the Voice of America. This frees Shakespeare to travel widely and gather ideas, most of which seem to conform to his own world outlook.

Security Conscious

As one of his senior subordinates explains it, Shakespeare basically sees the world in terms of security, and therefore holds that the USIA's function is to support America's international military posture.

For this reason, this subordinate says, Shakespeare recently reshuffled the agency to fold Greece and Turkey into the geographical section that covers the nations of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. He also placed under the same desk USIA activities in the Moslem countries from Morocco to Iran, largely on the grounds that they have oil resources in common.

Shakespeare's concern with military security was reportedly uppermost in his mind as well during a recent visit to Iceland. After noting that the Soviets had reinforced their submarine flotilla in the vicinity, he returned to Washington determined to strengthen the

USIA presence in Iceland in the belief that this would somehow help to defend the U.S.-manned NATO naval base there.

His conviction that the United States is locked in mortal struggle against the international Communist menace stimulates similar ventures by Shakespeare in other regions.

His visit to West Berlin last summer, for instance, coincided with the tenth anniversary of the erection of the Berlin Wall. This inspired him to issue orders that the anniversary be given heavy coverage by USIA media. The orders led to the production of "Barriade," a movie designed to show, as Shakespeare reportedly put it, "that the Communists have to lock up their people."

Strangely enough, however, the focus on the Berlin Wall evoked a cool reaction from the West Germans. As one USIA official put it, "We are still fighting the Communists while they are trying to come to terms with them."

Shakespeare's personnel policies win praise from many USIA employees. They approve of his efforts to give important jobs to women and his program to raise the representation of blacks and other minorities in the agency. They also applauded his decision to give a voice to younger staff members by creating the Young Officers Policy Panel.

But many USIA officials are deeply disturbed by Shakespeare's anti-Communist militancy. Most of these officials tend to be liberals and, as one of them put it, "We can't work efficiently unless we believe in what we're doing." They argue as well that Shakespeare's attitudes violate President Nixon's dictum that the United States is passing from an era of confrontation to an era of negotiation.

There seems to be a wide-



BRUCE HERSCHENSOHN
... the movie maker

spread feeling within the agency, too, that Shakespeare's concentration on Communism misses the point of many major issues in the world today.

One high-ranking official said: "Frank is currently hooked on the idea that all refugees in the world are victims of Communism. But that leaves out millions of refugees in the Middle East and South Asia. In that respect, his line is simply irrelevant and we're wasting our time trying to propagate it."

Several young officials are particularly concerned by this question of "relevance." One of them explained that the USIA "starts out from the wrong assumption that foreign minds can be manipulated, that we can really influence foreign opinion."

This young official chal-

lenges the validity of an internal memorandum recently circulated within the agency declaring that "more information will lead to a greater appreciation of the U.S. position." Said the official:

"That is a false premise. It just isn't true that an Ethiopian or a Brazilian will become pro-American if he is told more about the United States. Getting the text of President Nixon's latest speech in the hands of a Peruvian peasant is a waste of effort."

Equally futile, this young official contends, is the notion that explanations of American policy will win support for the United States. Such a view was expounded to the USIA in early December by "National Review" editor William L. Buckley, a member of the five-man Advisory Commission on Information, which counsels the agency.

Buckley said in his statement that the agency's biggest failure was its inability to articulate to foreign correspondents in Saigon the real motives behind the U.S. commitment to Vietnam. Replying to that argument, the young USIA official said: "Your propaganda can't be better than your policy."

Many USIA officials of all ages are also troubled by Shakespeare's refusal to permit the agency to show the seamier side of American life. In USIA jargon, consequently, "better balance" signifies displaying only the good side of the United States to offset the

image of poverty, violence, racial tensions and other shabbiness in commercial American films and novels.

This tilt is scrupulously avoided in Voice of America newscasts, which covered the Mylai trials and other such event with professional competence. Voice of America commentaries are another matter, however.

VOA has a crew of five commentators who tailor their "analysis" to directives handed down by policy guidance officers. In one recent instance, when North Vietnam allowed U.S. prisoners to send letters home for Christmas, policy called for emphasizing that the Communists neglect the Geneva Convention on POWs and that captives in South Vietnam are treated better than those in Hanoi.

In making USIA films, where the effort to present only favorable aspects of the United States is more pronounced. Herschensohn apparently requires little guidance. He recently refused to produce a movie on university life in America, explaining that "we would have to show student dissent, and that tarnishes our image."

Major Successes

With all this, the USIA has been successful in some parts of the world. Probably its two biggest achievements have been in Germany and Japan. The agency went into these countries immediately after World War II, and helped to remold attitudes toward parliamentary government.

In West Germany, accord-

ing to Washington Post correspondent John Goshko, "you cannot find a responsible official, journalist or academician who does not credit the agency with assisting the country to become a democratic state." One beneficiary of the USIA's activities there was West German Chancellor Willy Brandt, who first visited the United States under the agency's auspices.

During the U.S. occupation of Germany after the war, the USIA ran newspapers and radio stations and helped to found major educational institutions, such as the Free University of Berlin.

Within recent years, the USIA has no longer had any need to assist in the evolution of German democracy, and instead focuses mainly on exposing the Germans to American art and literature.

Shortly after assuming his post, Shakespeare visited Bonn and startled Brandt and other West German officials by lecturing them on the dangers of trying to improve their relations with the Communists. The lectures were not well received.

Shakespeare has been more subdued on subsequent visits to Germany. Moreover, USIA officials on the ground tend to disregard Washington directives that urge them to put out anti-Communist propaganda. Many say, in fact, that they face less tension than they did during the Johnson administration, when their loyalty was measured by their zeal in promoting the right-

eousness of the Vietnam war.

In contrast to the Washington line, therefore, USIA employees in West Germany do not shy away from publicizing American problems. One of the most successful programs in this realm was a speaking tour by Richard D. Hatcher, the black mayor of Gary, Ind., who candidly discussed racial problems in U.S. cities.

Similarly, agency representatives in Japan say that the USIA line out of Washington is more anti-Communist than at any time since the mid-1950s. But, these representatives explain, they are free to ignore guidance and conduct their business as they see fit.

As it did in Germany, the USIA in Japan has left a legacy among the country's elite. These include newspaper editors and television commentators whose experience goes back to the days of the American occupation.

As they look toward the future, many USIA officials in Washington are persuaded that the agency needs a serious overhaul.

Deputy Director Henry Loomis subscribes to recommendations made by the Brookings Institution in 1960 that a super-secretariat of foreign affairs be created to embrace separate departments for diplomacy, aid and cultural affairs. This reorganization, similar to the reform of the Defense Department, would give the USIA parity with the State Department and the Agency for International Development.